

REMARKS

This Response is submitted in reply to the Office Action dated March 7, 2007. Claims 1, 24, 28, 33, 34, and 35 have been amended. Applicants respectfully request reconsideration of Claims 1 to 39 in view of the above claim amendments and the following remarks.

A petition for a one-month extension of time to respond to the Office Action and Supplemental Information Disclosure Statement (IDS) are submitted herewith. Please charge deposit account number 02-1818 to cover the cost of the one-month extension of time, the Supplemental IDS, and any other fees due in connection with the filing of this Response.

The Office Action rejected claims 1-23, 29-33, 35, 36, and 39 under 35 U.S.C. §102(b) as being anticipated by Vancura (U.S. Patent No. 6,033,307). Applicants respectfully disagree with and traverse this rejection for at least the reasons discussed below.

The Office Action does not properly reject claims 29 to 33. Claims 29 to 33 depend from independent claim 24, which is not anticipated by Vancura. Accordingly, dependent claims 29 to 33, which include all of the elements of independent claim 24, are not anticipated by Vancura. Applicants respectfully submit that claims 29 to 33 are in condition for allowance.

Independent Claim 1 is directed to a method for facilitating a play of a slot game that includes, amongst other elements, (b) presenting symbols in each of the active reel segments, (c) providing an award, if any, based on the symbols presented in each of the active reel segments, (d) deactivating the active reel segments that are associated with a discontinue symbol, (e) determining which active reel segments, if any, have been deactivated, and (f) repeating (b) to (e) in the same play of the slot game until a predetermined number of the active reel segments have been deactivated.

Vancura discloses a gaming device with a primary slot machine and a secondary slot machine. After a bonus qualifying event occurs in the primary slot machine, a bonus game is provided by the secondary slot machine. The reels of the secondary slot machine include value symbols, null symbols and end-game symbols, such as a lose symbol and a stop game symbol. For each play of the bonus game, the reels of the

secondary slot machine are spun and stopped. Any values of any value symbols are accumulated until the bonus game ends. All of the reels of the secondary slot machine continue to be spun until one or more of the end-game symbols occur on the reels. Vancura counts the end-game symbols as they occur on the reels of the secondary slot machine. When the count reaches a predetermined number, the bonus game ends.

Vancura does not disclose a processor programmed to (i) present symbols in each of the active reel segments, (ii) provide an award, if any, based on the symbols presented in each of the active reel segments, (iii) determine which active reels, if any, have been deactivated, and (iv) repeat the random presentation of symbols, the provision of an award, if any, and the deactivation of the reels, in the same play of the bonus game. Vancura determines if an end-game symbol (e.g., "lose" or "stop") has occurred on the reels of the bonus event. In response to such occurrence of the end-game symbol, the end-game symbol is counted. One or more end-game symbols can cause the bonus event to end. If more than one end-game symbol causes the bonus event to end, Vancura discloses to spin and stop all the reels for one or more subsequent spins until the number of end-game symbols reaches a predetermined count. Contrary to the Office Action explanation, Vancura does not deactivate any reels of the secondary slot machine after an end-game symbol occurs. Instead, if one or more end-game symbols occur, Vancura ends the bonus game without deactivating any of the reels of the secondary slot machine.

During the bonus game, Vancura discloses to accumulate any awards based on the symbols that occur on the reels of the secondary slot machine. The awards accumulate through an initial spin and any subsequent spins of the reels. As discussed above, Vancura does not deactivate any of the reels of the secondary slot machine for the initial spin, or any of the subsequent spins. Once the number of end-game symbols reaches a predetermined count, the bonus game ends. In other embodiments, the bonus game ends when the player generates a stop signal or when the player accumulates a predetermined number of credits.

Thus, unlike independent claim 1, Vancura does not repeat the bonus game (i.e., spin the reels of the secondary slot machine) in the same play after the occurrence of the end-game symbol. As described above, Vancura ends the bonus game after the

occurrence of the predetermined count of end-game symbols. Additionally, Vancura does not determine which active reel segments, if any, have been deactivated after a spin of the reels of the secondary slot machine. In Vancura, all of the reels are "deactivated" after a predetermined count of end-game symbols occur on the reels. That is, all of the reels are spun and stopped for each spin. Vancura does not, and has no reason to, determine which of the reels of the secondary slot machine are deactivated for repeated spins in the same play. Moreover, Vancura does not provide an award based on symbols presented in active reel segments because in Vancura, the awards are accumulated based on symbols presented on all of the reels, not the active reels, until the bonus game ends. For at least these reasons, Vancura does not disclose each and every element of independent claim 1 and its dependent claims. Accordingly, Vancura does not anticipate the method of independent Claim 1 and its dependent claims. Applicants respectfully submit that independent Claim 1 and its dependent claims are patently distinguished from Vancura and in condition for allowance.

Claims 2-23 and 36 depend from independent claim 1 and are in condition for allowance for the reasons given above with respect to claim 1, and because of the additional features recited in these claims.

Independent Claim 35 is patently distinguished over Vancura for similar reasons as given above with respect to independent Claim 1. Claim 39 depends from independent Claim 35 and is in condition for allowance for the reasons given above with respect to Claim 35, and because of the additional features recited in this claim.

The Office Action rejected claims 24-28, 34, 37, and 38 under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) as being unpatentable over Mayeroff (U.S. Patent No. 6,186,894) in view of Vancura. Applicants respectfully disagree with and traverse this rejection for at least the reasons discussed below.

Independent Claim 24 is directed to a casino gaming apparatus that includes, amongst other elements, a processor programmed to (i) identify a predetermined symbol combination occurring on the display grid during the standard mode of operation to activate the bonus mode of operation, and during the bonus mode of operation, in the

same play of the game, the processor programmed to (ii) randomly present symbols via a physical reel configuration which includes one or more active reels having corresponding reel strips, (iii) provide an award, if any, based on the symbols randomly presented via any of the active reels, (iv) deactivate any of the active reels presenting a discontinue symbol, (v) determine which active reels, if any, have been deactivated, and (vi) repeat the random presentation of symbols, the provision of an award, if any, the deactivation of the reels associated with the discontinue symbol, and the determination of which reels, if any, have been deactivated until a predetermined number of the reels have been deactivated.

It should be noted that the previous Office Action stated that Mayeroff was silent with regard to "a processor configuring to repeat to randomly present the symbols and deactivation of the reels associated with the discontinue symbols until all of the reels have been deactivated." However, the current Office Action contradicts the previous Office Action by stating that Mayeroff teaches this feature. Applicants respectfully disagree.

Mayeroff discloses a slot machine having a first set of reels for a primary game and a second set of reels for a bonus game. The Mayeroff slot machine provides a player multiple plays or chances of the bonus game. In each play of the Mayeroff bonus game, the second set of reels is rotated and stopped one time to determine any bonus win provided to the player. The bonus game ends when the number of chances for the bonus game expires. Thus, Mayeroff spins and stops each reel for each play or chance of the bonus game. None of the secondary event reels in Mayeroff are deactivated after presenting a discontinue symbol. Additionally, Mayeroff does not provide an award based on symbols presented in the active reel segments because in Mayeroff, the awards are accumulated based on symbols presented on all of the reels, not the active reels, until the bonus game ends. Furthermore, Mayeroff does not repeat the random presentation of symbols, the provision of an award, if any, and the deactivation of the reels associated with the discontinue symbols until all of the reels have been deactivated because, for each chance in Mayeroff's bonus game, all of the secondary reels are spun and stopped.

Additionally, the Office Action recognized that Mayeroff does not disclose a processor that is programmed to determine which active reels, if any, have been deactivated. The Office Action relied on Vancura to disclose this feature.

Vancura does not remedy the deficiencies of Mayeroff set forth above with respect to independent claim 24. Neither Vancura nor Mayeroff disclose a processor programmed to determine which active reels, if any, have been deactivated. As described above, Vancura determines if an end-game symbol (e.g., "lose" or "stop") has occurred on the reels of the secondary slot machine and ends the bonus game when a predetermined count of end-game symbols occur on the reels of the secondary slot machine. Thus, like Mayeroff, Vancura discloses a bonus game or event in which each of the reels are activated and stopped for each play of the bonus game. Neither Mayeroff nor Vancura, whether considered alone or in combination, provides an award, if any, based on the symbols randomly presented via the active reels, deactivates a reel after that reel presents a discontinue symbol, and repeats the random presentation of symbols, the provision of an award, if any, and the deactivation of the reels in the same play of the bonus game.

Accordingly, the proposed combination of Mayeroff and Vancura does not disclose each and every element of independent claim 24 and its dependent claims. Thus, the proposed combination of Mayeroff and Vancura does not render obvious a casino gaming apparatus as in independent Claim 24. Applicants respectfully submit that independent Claim 24 is patentably distinguished over the proposed combination of Mayeroff and Vancura and in condition for allowance.

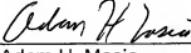
Claims 25-28 and 37 depend from Claim 24 and are in condition for allowance for the reasons given above with respect to Claim 24, and because of the additional features recited in these claims.

Independent Claim 34 is patentably distinguished over the proposed combination of Mayeroff and Vancura for similar reasons as given above with respect to independent Claim 24. Claim 38 depends from independent Claim 34 and is in condition for allowance for the reasons given above with respect to Claim 34, and because of the additional features recited in this claim.

An earnest endeavor has been made to place this application in condition for formal allowance and in the absence of more pertinent art such action is courteously solicited. If the Examiner has any questions regarding this Response, Applicants respectfully request that the Examiner contact the undersigned.

Respectfully submitted,

BELL, BOYD & LLOYD LLP

BY 

Adam H. Masia
Reg. No. 35,602
Customer No.: 29159

Dated: July 9, 2007